

Proclamations

Proc. 6862

NOW, THEREFORE, I, WILLIAM J. CLINTON, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim January 15, 1996, as the Martin Luther King, Jr., Federal Holiday. I call upon the people of the United States to observe this occasion with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twelfth day of January, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-six, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twentieth.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

Proclamation 6862 of January 12, 1996

Religious Freedom Day, 1996

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

On this day over 200 years ago, Virginia's General Assembly passed a law that created the first legal protection for religious freedom in this country. Introducing his bill to the Virginia Assembly, Thomas Jefferson stated that he was not creating a new right confined simply to the State of Virginia or to the United States, but rather declared religious liberty to be one of the "natural rights of mankind" that should be shared by all people. Jefferson's language was shepherded through the legislature by James Madison, who later used it as a model for the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

Americans have long benefited from our founders' wisdom, and the Constitution's twin pillars of religious liberty—its protection of the free exercise of religion and its ban on the establishment of religion by the Government—have allowed an enormous diversity of spiritual beliefs to thrive throughout our country. Today, more than 250,000 churches, synagogues, mosques, meeting houses, and other places of worship serve to bring citizens together, strengthening families and helping communities to keep their faith traditions alive. We must continue to ensure full protection for religious liberty and help people of different faiths to find common ground.

Our Nation's profound commitment to religious freedom reminds us that many people around the world lack the safeguard of law to protect them from prejudice and persecution. We deplore the religious intolerance that too often tears neighbor from neighbor, and we must remain an international advocate for the ideal of human brotherhood and sisterhood and for the basic rights that sustain human dignity and personal freedom. Let us pledge our support to all who struggle against religious oppression and rededicate ourselves to fostering peace among people with divergent beliefs so that what Americans experience as a "natural right" may be enjoyed by individuals and societies everywhere.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, WILLIAM J. CLINTON, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitu-

Proc. 6863

Title 3—The President

tion and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim January 16, 1996, as Religious Freedom Day. I call upon the people of the United States to observe this day with appropriate ceremonies, activities, and programs, and I urge all Americans to reaffirm their devotion to the fundamental principles of religious freedom and religious tolerance.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twelfth day of January, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-six, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twentieth.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

Proclamation 6863 of January 30, 1996

National African American History Month, 1996

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Today's schoolchildren are fortunate to grow up in classrooms where they are taught to appreciate all of the many heroes of American history. While previous generations read textbooks that told only part of our Nation's story, materials have been developed in recent years that give our students a fuller picture—textured and deepened by new characters and themes. African American History Month provides a special opportunity for teachers and schools to celebrate this ongoing process and to focus on the many African Americans whose lives have shaped our common experience.

This year, our observance emphasizes black women and the strides made to bring their achievements to the fore. From Sojourner Truth's sermons, to Mary McLeod Bethune's speeches, to the contemporary novels of Nobel laureate Toni Morrison, the voices of African American women have called attention to the twin burdens of racism and sexism and have invited listeners to discover the richness of traditions kept alive in back kitchens and workrooms. In churches and communities, and more recently in universities and statehouses across America, these women have fought extraordinary battles for social, economic, and political empowerment.

Barbara Jordan once wrote,

'We the people'; it is a very eloquent beginning. But when the Constitution of the United States was completed on the seventeenth of September, 1787, I was not included in that 'We the people.'

As we mourn the loss of this great American, let us honor her by seeking to further the progress made since those early days toward true equality and inclusion. During African American History Month and throughout the year, we must embrace the diverse strands of our story so that all children can see themselves in our Nation's past and know that they have a role to play in seizing the future's countless opportunities.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, WILLIAM J. CLINTON, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitu-